Healthy Forests Report

May 5, 2006

The Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service implement the National Fire Plan (NFP) and Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) in order to help save the lives of firefighters and citizens and to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to our communities, forests, and rangelands.

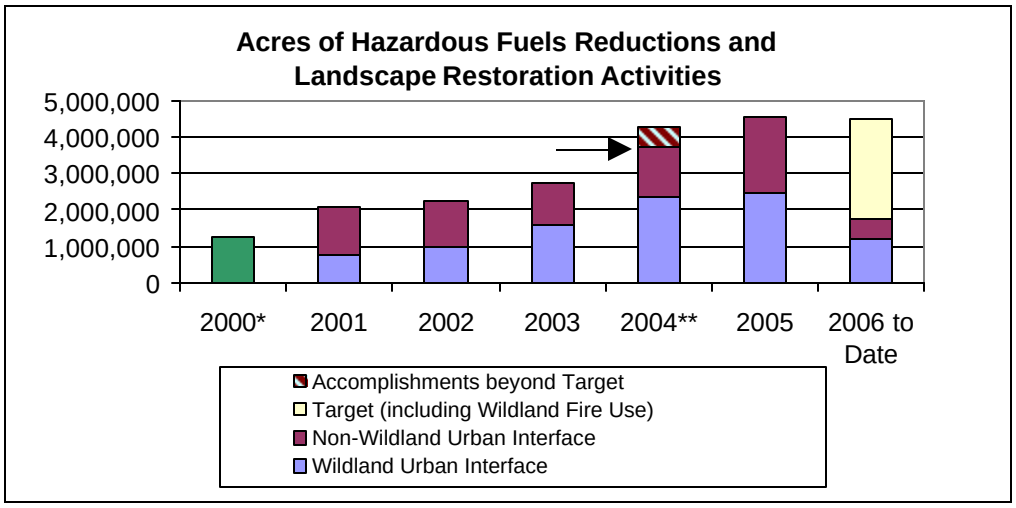
HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION & LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROJECTS

An excessive accumulation of hazardous or unusually flammable fuels in our forests, woodlands, and grasslands is the root cause of the unprecedented fire risk facing our public lands. Land managers remove hazardous fuels via programs funded specifically for that purpose and in other programs whose principle goal is the achievement of a variety of resource management objectives that can be broadly labeled landscape restoration. Treatments occur both inside and outside the wildland urban interface (WUI).

1. Inside the WUI treatments reduce fuels around homes, communities, and resources to slow or stop wildland fires from threatening these high-value areas.

2. Beyond the WUI, treatments not only help protect communities by creating conditions that enable firefighters to more successfully suppress fires before they enter the WUI but also reduce fire severity and its impact on valued landscapes and natural resources.

Under Healthy Forests Initiative and the National Fire Plan, the Federal land management agencies have treated over 15 million acres of federal lands since 2000. These treatments have contributed to the reduced threat of catastrophic wildland fire.



* FY 2000 is used as a baseline for reporting, as the NFP was implemented in FY 2001. Treatment location was not included in reporting prior to FY 2001.

** Acres treated under landscape restoration activities were not reported prior to FY 2004.

Table 1: Hazardous Fuels & Landscape Restoration Activities, FY 2006 *(as of 5/1/06)*

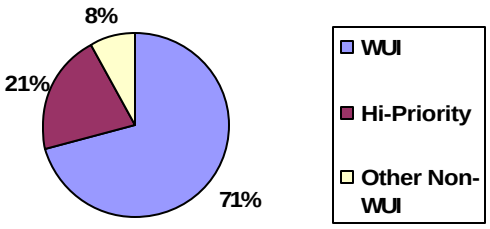
	Hazardous Fuels Appropriations		Landscape Restoration Appropriations		
Treatment Type	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**TOTAL**
Forest Service	781,361	172,703	78,681	181,587	**1,214,332**
DOI	325,570	165,046	4,289	18,319	**513,224**
TOTAL	**1,106,931**	**337,749**	**82,970**	**199,906**	**1,727,556**

Note: Total does not include acres treated by Wildland Fire Use on Forest Service Lands or acres treated with State Fire Assistance funding.

Hazardous Fuels and Landscape Restoration Priorities

The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior design hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities to meet one of three objectives:

1. Directly reduce wildfire threats within the wildland urban interface.
2. Treat areas outside of the wildland-urban interface (non-WUI) that are at greatest risk of catastrophic wildland fire. These *high priority non-WUI treatments* reduce the risk of unwanted fire to natural resources, achieve other natural resource management objectives, and, in some cases also serve to protect WUI areas.



3. Maintain desired landscape conditions achieved through previous treatments outside the WUI in order to retain the associated benefits.

HEALTHY FORESTS AUTHORITIES

Implementation of activities under the HFI and HFRA authorities can be summarized as a three-step process:

1. NEPA Planning and Decisions – Activities that will require NEPA Decisions are identified (this generally occurs up to 3 years prior to actual project implementation). The planning is typically broad in scope, and may include multiple treatments.
2. Analysis and Preparation – Project preparation and design generally occur in the year prior to implementation. Project scope, location and treatment type are refined.
3. Treatment Planning and Accomplishment – Final planning and implementation occur.

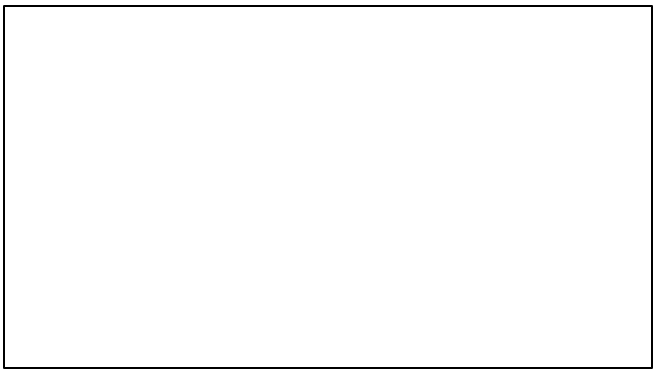
Table 2: Healthy Forests Activities, FY 2006

Treatments Planned	Treatments Completed	Acres Planned	HFI/HFRA Acres Completed
2,439	825	536,693	156,490

UTILIZATION OF FOREST BYPRODUCTS

Byproducts removed during hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities are often utilized in certain forest products (e.g., timber, engineered lumber, paper and pulp, furniture) and bio-energy and bio-based products (e.g., plastics, ethanol, and diesel). To date, the Forest Service and DOI have treated 295,062 acres mechanically; of these, 24% have included biomass utilization.

Biomass Utilization from All Mechanically Treated Acres



STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS AWARDED

Stewardship contracting includes natural resource management activities that improve land conditions. These projects shift the focus of federal forest and rangeland management towards a desired future resource condition. They are also a means for federal agencies to contribute to the development of sustainable rural communities, maintain healthy forest ecosystems, and provide a continuing source of local income and employment.

Table 3: Stewardship Contracts & Agreements

	Bureau of Land Management		**Forest Service**	
2003	2 contracts	300 acres	50 contracts	14,000 acres
2004	22 contracts	15,000 acres	64 contracts	42,000 acres
2005	58 contracts awarded	15,000 acres	44 contracts	35,500 acres
2006	7 contracts awarded	6,043 acres	29 contracts	21,000 acres
Total	**276 contracts / agreements for 148,843 acres***			

*Not all projects in table above were authorized under HFRA.

HFRA TITLE IV: APPLIED RESEARCH

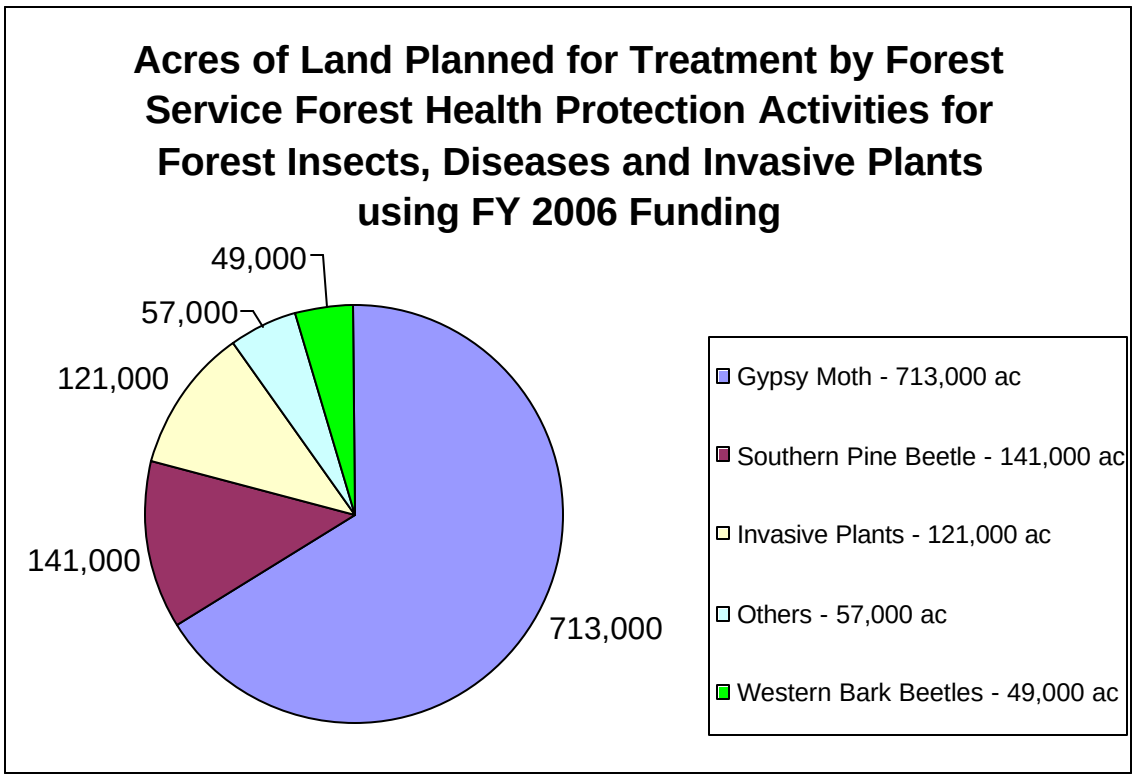
The Forest Service's applied research projects, in partnership with several universities and state forestry agencies, aim to conduct and evaluate different land management practices that reduce problems associated with the current outbreaks of insects and diseases and to translate that information for practicing professionals, landowners, and the public.

There are currently 6 Silvicultural Assessment and 6 Accelerated Information Gathering projects planned or underway. For more information of the Forest Service's Applied Research Projects under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, please visit:

http://www.healthyforests.gov/applied_research/index.html

INVASIVE SPECIES AND FOREST HEALTH

In FY 2006, Forest Service Forest Health Protection activities include both prevention and suppression efforts and provided resources to restore lands impacted by native and nonnative forest pests on federal, state and private lands. Some of the nonnative pests addressed included: hemlock woolly adelgid, white pine blister rust, gypsy moth, sudden oak death, emerald ash borer, Asian long horned beetle, European wood wasp, cycad scale, wiliwili gall wasp and invasive plants. Over one million acres are planned to be treated as a result of Forest Health Protection efforts funded in FY 2006.



Though various nonnative species are being treated, the only data currently available regarding accomplishment are for gypsy moth where over 689,024 acres were treated.

All projects planned for southern pine beetle and most for western bark beetles improve condition class. Nearly 141,000 acres for southern pine beetle and 33,000 acres for western bark beetles are proposed for thinning, planting, sanitation or site preparation treatments on state, private, and federal lands. These treatments improve condition class. To date, over 121,765 acres have been reported accomplished for southern pine beetle and 5,263 acres for western bark beetles.

FOREST SERVICE USE OF THE ESA COUNTERPART REGULATIONS

Since the training module on procedures, the Section 7 consultation standards of review, and monitoring was prepared in May, 2004, over 250 Forest Service line officers, and over 500 biologists have both taken the training and been certified to use the regulations. Through February, 2005, over 50 NFP projects had used the process, and the amount of use since then

will be known in March, 2006. The one-year evaluation of counterpart regulation use is ongoing, and results of that will be used to make any needed improvements in the use of this important tool.

HEALTHY FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

New Jersey develops the East Plains Fireshed Management Plan

The New Jersey Pinelands is a fire adapted forest ecosystem that depends on wildfire for reproduction and the control of fuel buildup. This forest community is one of the most hazardous wildland fuel types in the nation. Pinelands fires burn extremely hot and spread rapidly. New Jersey's high population density has created land use pressures as more people move from urban areas to rural wildland areas.

To address this challenge, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service has used National Fire Plan funding to develop and implement the East Plains Fireshed Management Plan. This plan covers approximately 90,000 acres and six municipalities. The plan is a collaborative mitigation effort with local, state and federal partners that includes: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection agencies; the Pinelands Commission; US Air Force; NJ Air National Guard; the Garden State Parkway Commission; Ocean and Burlington Counties; and local municipalities. The plan uses mechanical fuel reduction and prescribed burning to reduce accumulated fuels in the Pinelands and adjacent to the Warren Grove Bombing Range. In addition, the plan provides for the construction and maintenance of fire lines, fire roads and fuel breaks.

National Fire Plan funds are also available to communities through a grant program to develop and initiate firewise education, hazard mitigation and community wildfire risk education programs. National Fire Plan funding has helped support 600 acres of prescribed fire treatments, and construction and maintenance of 221 miles of firelines and fuelbreaks to reduce the potential for crown fires and the spread of wildfire into adjacent developments. The Community Wildfire Hazard Assistance Grant Program has been utilized by 50 applicants within the East Plains Fireshed to complete projects totaling $150,000 in this high priority area.